Classroom overload

By Jennifer Smith
Staff Writer

Put 650 people in a space built for 300 and what do you have?
Lindon Elementary School.
This small elementary school in Youngsville is a perfect example of Lafayette's growing problem of overcrowded schools.
There are now more children in temporary buildings at Lindon than there are in the main building, said Principal Catherine Orgeron.
This has caused problems for students, teachers and administrators at the school.

Orgeron said all of Lindon's facilities, such as the cafeteria and the two sets of rest rooms, were meant to accommodate 300 students.

With more than double that amount now attending the school, Orgeron said the are having to squeeze the students in the best way they can.

Lunch starts at 10:25 a.m. for many students at Lindon. The music teacher has to haul her teaching materials all over the school. Children and teachers use ponchos to shield themselves from the rain when they have to come to the building for lunch or the restroom.

Once the students reach third grade at Lindon, they know that the rest of their classroom time at the school will be spent in a temporary building.

Orgeron said the students accept it because they are used to it, but teachers there have a hard time teaching in the temporary buildings.

Teachers would rather be teaching in the main building, she said, and most have complained about structural problems with the temporary buildings. Sometimes teachers cannot hear over the hum of the air conditioner and they have to turn it off to teach. Most of the nine temporary buildings also do not have covered walkways to the school.

"It makes it difficult for us to move...

Please see Classroom, A-6
Classroom: Overload

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Report

prices are more affordable here than in Lafayette,” she said. “People can get a $100,000 house in this area for what they would be paying $200,000 for in Lafayette.”

The school board had estimated enrollment would be up at Lindon this year, and the school received another temporary building to house these students.

But this building cannot be used until an electrical problem is repaired.

In the meantime the special education classes that were supposed to use this building are using the school’s stage in the cafeteria and a teacher’s conference area.

Another area school that has had its share of overcrowding problems is Plantation Elementary.

Plantation Principal Marcus Denais said his school was relieved two years ago when the school board approved the move of the school’s fourth and fifth grade classes to LeRosen Elementary.

But they are still slowly gaining students, and Denais said they are not getting a permanent wing.

Plantation, which was built to accommodate 600 students, has 767 students and 14 classrooms in temporary buildings. The students using these temporary buildings also have no covered walkways to get to the main building.

Denais said it costs about $100 a foot to build covered walkways, and it is probably more economically to build new schools.

“It costs almost as much for more temporary buildings and sidewalks as it costs for a new school,” he said.

Bush said his staff is now working on a plan for the construction of new schools and will submit a formal plan to the board in the next two or three months.

Areas of Lafayette may also be rezoned to move children from crowded areas to areas with fewer students.

Although no rezoning plans are being considered, Bush said something will have to be done if the school board does not take action soon.

“Until the board makes a decision to issue new bonds for the construction of new schools, we’re going to have to house these children any way we can,” Bush said.

Lafayette Superintendent Max Skidmore said no plans are final, but the school board staff is looking at building an elementary school in the Carencro area and another elementary school in the northeast section of the city.

Skidmore said they also would like to replace Moss Middle with another middle school and are looking at high growth areas in south and west Lafayette for possible new schools.

Public response to overcrowding in the schools has been vocal, but few can agree on the solution to the problem.

Year-round schooling was not supported by the community, and a half cent sales tax for the construction of new schools was soundly defeated.

Even if the school board can come up with the money for new schools, Bush said there are many more costs.

“When we build a new school, that has to be added to the budget,” Bush said.

Bush said the cost of hiring a principal and vice principal would cost almost $100,000.

“The idea of building new schools is an idea everyone supports,” Bush said. “But in addition to that you have a staff, and that’s a recurring cost.”